



La Quinta Culinary Arts Institute

When FCSI member **Richard Dieli**'s company was given the task of building a state-of-the-art training kitchen for La Quinta High School in California, it rose to the challenge, as Jackie Mitchell discovered

Dieli Murawka Howe (DMH), based in San Diego, California, was asked to build a training kitchen facility for the La Quinta Culinary Arts Institute at La Quinta High School, California. The brief was that it not only had to be the best quality for the students, but it also needed to last for a long time, to enable the school to deliver a high-quality culinary arts programme for students aged 13 to 18.

Richard Dieli FCSI, says: “The students compete in top culinary competitions so needed a quality training facility to enable them to reach the highest standards. We designed the instructor’s demonstration station and the training kitchen.”

DMH worked with architects Ruhnau Ruhnau Clarke, and principal and president Roger Clarke explains further: “Our challenge was to create a career technical education facility at an existing high school. The culinary arts kitchen is designed as a hands-on teaching kitchen with a lecture and demonstration facility. It was envisaged that the students would progress from the classroom into the kitchen, learning basic knife skills, recipe preparation, meal planning and virtually everything that goes into the operation of a foodservice facility. It includes both the kitchen experience and also the serving and front of house operations.”

According to Sheri Tucker, deputy head and lead instructor of the Culinary Arts Institute, more realistic kitchen facilities were required which would contribute to the future success of the school. It would mean students entering competitions would be better prepared to win scholarships to cultural institutes or enter the restaurant/foodservice industry. “The new institute means they can enter the industry at a higher level than basic entry because of their qualifications,” she explains.

Every year the school enters the prestigious National ProStart Invitational competition, which has two categories. The first is to design a ‘virtual’ restaurant from a business plan and the second is the gourmet meal – a team of four have an hour to produce a three-course meal using two gas

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Roger Clarke of architects Ruhnau Ruhnau Clarke

burners with no running water or ovens.

This year the school won the gourmet meal category at the regional heat in California, for only the second time in eight years, whereas it had won the ‘virtual’ restaurant category five times. Winning dishes included mussel and carrot potage with onions and parsley flatbread and harissa-braised chicken with saffron-infused couscous with spinach.

It means that this year La Quinta will go through to the national competition, to be held in Minnesota, from 3-5 May. “So the new institute did live up to expectations and we ended up winning the regional heat,” says a delighted Tucker. “We will be working very hard between now and May.”

Clarke says: “Our goal was to provide a highly flexible space. We designed a lecture/demonstration space that can be closed off to the teaching kitchen or fully opened to create a highly integrated space. The cooking stations for groups of students allow for individualised instruction, while the catering and preparation area and the separate baking area all act to create a cohesive facility capable of creating a real-world environment.”

The choice of equipment was crucial. DMH worked with Viking Cooking Equipment to design six cooking suites for students. Dieli says: “The student suites are set up as back-to-back stations that encourage interaction and viewing. We wanted the students to be able to see what each other is doing and be more collaborative. Each student station includes open burners with a central bain marie for the *mise en place* – the area where students assemble the ingredients needed for a particular dish. One of the student stations is designed to be wheelchair-accessible. The end of each station has a preparation room and a wash/ prep sink station. There’s also a pot and pan warewashing area for students to clear up.”

Each station is designed to have as many as four students working each side. The stations are designed to encourage *Iron Chef America*-style competitions within the classroom >



Equipment

Equipment suppliers for La Quinta Culinary Arts Institute included the following:

Viking Cooking Equipment designed the six cooking suites.

Gaylord Industries supplied ventilation hoods "which are not only energy saving but crucially also have low decibel rating so the instructor can be heard over the exhaust volume when all the hoods are turned on," adds Dieli.

Cleveland supplied the steam equipment – braising pans, kettles and steamers, while **Delfield** provided the counters. **Thermalrite** provided the walk-in refrigerator and freezer, while **Hobart** supplied slicers, mixers and dishwashers.

The baking oven was from **Garland**, the proofer was from **Traulsen** and the sheeter and rounder by **Doyon**.



1. GETTING READY

Food preparation is underway as one student carefully slices vegetables

2. PROSTART COMPETITION

Five happy La Quinta students present some of their winning dishes from the regional heats

3. STATE OF THE ART

Hobart slicers, mixers and warewashers are among the top-of-the-range equipment available

4. REAL WORLD READY

The students' cooking area boasts similar facilities to those found in a professional kitchen

5. FLEXIBLE APPROACH

Instructors can demonstrate either to the lecture hall side or direct into the kitchen



environment (following the format of the popular *Iron Chef* TV show).

Dieli says: “The students’ cooking area is fitted with professional equipment, including kettles, braziers, combi ovens. It’s a complete cooking line that you’d find in a restaurant so students can get familiar with it.”

The instructor’s island counter, with a similar lay-out, is designed to allow the instructor to demonstrate and teach either to the classroom side or directly into the training kitchen. The island additionally has induction burners, as well as an induction wok, which is stored in a drawer.

There’s also a mirror above the instructor’s teaching suite so students can follow demonstrations clearly. A camera films the demonstrations and the footage is shown via large monitors into the classroom and the training kitchen. The video recordings are stored so students and staff can access them for later use.

The training kitchen also has a full bakery with commercial mixers, proofers, ovens and baking tables.

Dieli was involved in staff training on using the production space and how the equipment worked. “This project wasn’t just an installation,” he says. “We were getting the instructors

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Top: Each student station allows for up to four students to work side by side
Above right: Richard Dieli of DMH was tasked with designing the state-of-the-art training kitchen



Professional learning

Richard Dieli FCSI from Dieli Murawka Howe (DMH) says his remit was to make the facility just like a commercial professional kitchen. “There’s 5,500 sq ft of production space, which is daunting if you’re not accustomed to working in a commercial kitchen,” he says. “So we educated the instructors on how the production space was going to be used. We selected equipment manufacturers we had worked with before, including Viking and Cleveland, and they have been very supportive in demonstrating how to use the equipment.”

“We wanted the students to have more of a European influence in the cooking process and be able to see what each other is doing and be more collaborative. Overall the design works really well – the students can clearly see the instructor’s cooking demonstrations and copy what they’ve been taught. The students are thrilled to be using this great facility and are doing a great job getting used to the equipment. They love it.”